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Old Jamestown.





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*A
Glance
at its
History
Past
and
Present*

*By
Winifred
Sackville-
Stoner*

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In Commemoration
of the
First Settlement at Jamestown
"The Anglo-American Settlement
Tercentenary Exposition"
Will be Held at
Norfolk, Virginia, in
1907

OLD JAMESTOWN

(A glance at its History, past and present.)



SINCE it has been decided to hold "THE ANGLO-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT TERCENTENARY EXPOSITION" at Norfolk, Virginia, in 1907, a great deal of interest centres about the ruins of "OLD JAMESTOWN," the sight of the first permanent English settlement on American soil.

The history of its foundation takes us back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, when a number of rich and influential Englishmen became interested in Sir Walter Raleigh's schemes "to see an English nation planted in America" and, accordingly, several companies were organized for the purpose of sending colonists to the NEW WORLD.

These organizations were known as the London and Plymouth companies and King James, being pleased with their plans of colonization, granted the coast

of North America from Cape Fear to the mouth of the Potomac River to the London company; and from Long Island to Nova Scotia to the Plymouth company.

In the year 1606, the former company, at whose head were such influential men as Sir Edward Sackville (afterwards the famous Earl of Dorset) and the Earl of Southampton (the friend of Essex and patron of Shakespeare) fitted out three small ships.

This pigmy fleet was under the command of Captain Christopher Newport, Captain John Smith, Bartholomew Gosnold, and Edward Wingfield with Rev. Mr. Hunt acting as chaplain. They set sail from Blackwell December 19th, 1606, but were detained by contrary winds for six weeks within sight of the English coast, while discontentment and disorder daily threatened mutiny among the adventurers. Through the influence of the clergyman, Robert Hunt, the explorers became more content and finally reached the West Indies April 21st.

Hoping to find the coast of North Carolina, where former attempts to colonize had been made, they rested but a few days on these charming islands and then set sail once more. Being driven out of their course by a violent storm, they found themselves at the mouth of

Chesapeake bay, where they first caught sight of two points of land which they christened Cape Charles and Cape Henry in honor of the sons of their King.

They also discovered a beautiful point of land on the western side of this bay, which they appropriately called Point Comfort as it was here they found shelter from the storm. The savages who dwelt upon this land, treated the explorers very kindly and led the way through fields of wavy corn to their village called Kecoughtan (the present town of Hampton), where they entertained their strange guests with corn bread, tobacco and a dance of welcome, musical accompaniments being played on flutes of reeds.

As the red men were so friendly to the weary voyagers, the site a beautiful stretch of land, and the climate delightful, it seems strange that they did not plant their colony here. However, the members of the genus homo never seem to be satisfied and these explorers acted in a similar manner to the discontented man, whom a legend tells us was sent to the forest for a stick. At first he saw many straight smooth sticks, but he said: "Surely there are better ones farther on," and with this thought in mind he continued to the end of the forest where all he could find was a gnarled tree trunk.

So with the explorers, they left this beautiful spot (now a famous winter resort) and sailed for some distance up the James river, where at length they chose a site for their colony on a peninsula lying north of the river, forty miles from its mouth.

Captain John Smith was one of the bravest of men, but apparently not the wisest, for he considered this tract of land "as a fit place for a great city," whereas it was in reality a very unhealthy spot, having many marshes covered with water at high tide, making the soil an ideal nidus for malaria. The James river at this point is very muddy and the banks of the stream could not (even in those days) have presented any picturesque appearance. Gosnold was very much opposed to landing here, but the majority were of Smith's opinion and accordingly on the 13th of May, 1607, was made THE FIRST PERMANENT ENGLISH SETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES, called JAMESTOWN, in honor of King James.

Despite Captain Smith's predictions, Jamestown never became a great city, but after struggling against many horrible massacres by the Indians, destructive fires, starvation and sickness, the capitol was moved to Williamsburg in 1700 and the cradle of the United States of America was left to the destruction of the elements.

Now nothing remains of the old historic town but the ivy clad tower of the first Protestant church built on American soil and the ruins of the Ambler homestead, where George Washington and Thomas Jefferson both received a wound to their self pride: the former being jilted by Mary Cary and the latter by Rebecca Burwell.

In 1893 Mrs. Edward Barney, of Dayton, Ohio, purchased this neglected land and presented twenty-three acres to the Association for Preservation of Virginia Antiquities. This association cleared away the underbrush and enclosed the ruins of the old church and its burial ground within a wire fence, placing the sacred spot under the surveillance of a custodian, who lives in a picturesque cottage within the earth fortifications erected here by the Confederates in the late war.

For many years the land upon which Jamestown once stood has been growing smaller, owing to the rough kisses of the James river on her clay shores. For seven miles a swift current comes sweeping down unobstructed and the action of this current has already changed the one-time peninsula to an island. On the northern end of the island the waves have washed away the shores to such an extent

that the oldest ruins of Jamestown now lie under water and by rowing in a boat close to shore one can plainly see a mass of brick held together by its original cement, which is all that remains of a powder house built by Captain Smith as a place of safety for arms and ammunition.

Several years ago Congress made an appropriation of \$10,000 to build a sea wall as a protection for this historic spot from further damage, but an extra amount will be necessary for the work's completion and a bill favoring a second appropriation has been introduced into the House of Representatives.

The most interesting relic of Jamestown is the old church tower, which is supposed to stand upon the spot where the colonists first worshipped "under an old sail stretched between three or four trees to shadow them from the sun." After a time a rude structure was built of logs with a roof of rafts, sedge and earth, which was replaced in 1638 by a brick building 56x28 feet in dimension, with a tower 18 feet square. This building was destroyed by fire in 1676, but shortly afterwards rebuilt and occupied until 1700. Since that time the old church has been gradually crumbling away until nothing remains but the tower.

Tradition says that the brick from

which the church was built came from England. But Dr. Lyon G. Tyler, president of William and Mary college, has attempted to explode this theory, claiming that only a few bricks were brought to this country for ballast in English ships and that the material used in building the old church was made by Alexander Stoner from the clay on James Island, where he was allotted an acre of ground for a brick kiln.

At that time all brick was called "English brick" according to a law that each brick must be of a certain shape and size and Dr. Tyler thinks that this accounts for the belief that the old church and the early mansions along the James river were supposed to have been built of brick made in the mother country.

Around the ruins of the church is the burial ground, where a few tombs are to be seen and others are being unearthed through excavation made by the "Association for Preservation of Virginia Antiquities." The present wall around the graves was built in 1800 from the fragments of a wall still standing at that time and which covered far more space than the more modern enclosure.

Among the graves discovered here there is one of a truly honest if not righteous man for his epitaph reads :

Here Lyeth
William Sherwood,
Born in the Parish of White
Chapelle,
Near London.
A Great Sinner
Waiting for a Joyful Resurrection.

Rev. James Blair, the first president of William and Mary college, is also buried here. On his right side lies his wife, Sarah Blair (daughter of the original Benjamin Harrison, whose name appears upon almost every page of Virginian history), and on his left side is interred Lady Frances Berkeley, the wife of Sir William Berkeley, who at one time was Governor of Virginia.

In the spring of 1901, under the direction of Mr. John Tyler, the excavation of the whole interior of the church was begun and many interesting discoveries made.

The four walls of the original church were found to be in a fair state of preservation to a height from six inches to three feet above the foundation. Lying across the north and south of the aisle a tomb was unearthed, which judging from the armorial bearings on the stone, must have once held the body of a knight.

but unfortunately no trace of the plate containing the inscriptions now remains.

Near this tomb was a less pretentious one bearing the following epitaph : "Here lyeth John Clough, minister, who departed this life 11th of January, 16——" and in the north-west corner of the church a third tomb was found, which contained the skeleton of a man six feet six inches tall and one foot and five inches across the shoulders. The skull also was of a peculiar formation unlike that of the normal white man.

The unearthing of a knight's tomb furnishes conclusive proof that the site of the old church ruins is the exact spot where the colonists first worshipped as all evidences go to prove this tomb to be that of Sir George Yeardley, who was Governor at the time of his death in 1627. In those days it was customary to honor persons of distinction, after death, by burying them in the church-yard, and there was no other man during that time who could have been appropriately interred in so sacred a spot in a tomb bearing armorial designs.

The little island (now scarcely two and a half miles long by a half mile wide) which shelters these relics of the early English colonists, has witnessed more of American history than any other place on

this continent, being the fountain head of all American legislative activity and having received a baptism of patriotic blood in both of the great wars.

Therefore all true lovers of history should make an effort to visit this most historical spot of our glorious republic during the coming celebration of THE ANGLO-AMERICAN TERCENTENARY SETTLEMENT EXPOSITION to be held in 1907 at Norfolk, Virginia, only sixty miles distant from "OLD JAMESTOWN."



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